

# THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO SAINT MARK

## YEAR B

### BASIC INFORMATION

In his *Introduction to the New Testament*, 157-158, Raymond Brown writes: “By the time Mark wrote, Jesus had been preached as the Christ for several decades. To appreciate what this earliest preserved written portrayal contributed to our Christian heritage, one might reflect on what we would know about Jesus if we had just the letters of Paul. We would have a magnificent theology about what God has done in Christ, but Jesus would be left almost without a face. Mark gets the honor of having painted that face and made it part of the enduring gospel.”

Biblical scholars date the Gospel of Mark between 60 and 75 AD, its origin in Rome, though some propose northern Transjordan, the Decapolis and Galilee as alternatives. The early church attributed the authorship to Mark, a follower and interpreter of Peter. He is generally considered to be the same person as John Mark, who appears in Acts. His mother had a house in Jerusalem and he went with Barnabas and Paul on the first missionary journey.

Mark Allen Powell, in his *Fortress Introduction to the Gospels*, 40-45, finds these basic characteristics in Mark:

- ♦Urgency pervades the telling of the story.
- ♦Mark emphasizes Jesus’ deeds over words.
- ♦The passion narrative dominates in Mark.
- ♦The linguistic style is less refined.
- ♦Three literary devices characterize...this deceptively simple Gospel:
  - ♦Narrative anticipations: references that prepare readers for what will come later.
  - ♦Two-step progressions: repeating a statement to add precision or clarity.
  - ♦Intercalation: the “Markan sandwich.” One story is inserted within another.
- ♦The geographical focus is Galilee.
- ♦Mark appears to be for a Gentile audience.
- ♦Mark offers the most human portrait of Jesus in the Gospels.
- ♦There is a secrecy motif.
- ♦Mark highlights the failures of Jesus’ disciples from beginning to end.

### THE INCARNATION CYCLE

The first Gospel of Year B is from Mark, but not the beginning of Mark. We hear from Mark 13 about the need to be watchful and stay awake, always ready for the Second Coming of Jesus. The next chapter is the passion. Thus, at the beginning of the year, of the Incarnation Cycle, we are already pointed toward the saving passion, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

The Second Sunday of Advent presents John the Baptist, God’s messenger sent to announce the Messiah. Both John and Jesus will die in witness to the truth. John promises that the Messiah will administer baptism with the Holy Spirit, a baptism of blood. Here Mark’s Gospel describes the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus, but also points us to the paschal mystery, the very heart of our Christian life.

Matthew, Luke and John provide the balance of the readings from the Third Sunday of Advent till the end of the Christmas season, the Baptism of the Lord, which falls on Monday, January 9 in 2006. On that day, the Gospel of Mark returns, picking up where it left off on the Second Sunday of Advent. This and the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time present us with Jesus as the Son of God, ready to call disciples to service. When we move out of the Incarnation Cycle into Ordinary Time, we will see the marvelous deeds of Jesus and learn of the cost of discipleship.